New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1956

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1956 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

1955 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
Bus Stop	346
*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof	342
Chalk Garden (The)	227
*Damn Yankees	310
*Desk Set (The)	234
*Diary of Anne Frank (The)	257
*Hatful of Rain (A)	213
*Inherit the Wind	322
*Janus	201
*Lark (The)	206
*Matchmaker (The)	194
*No Time for Sergeants	238
*Pipe Dream	198
Plain and Fancy	382
Red Roses for Me	183
Righteous Are Bold (The)	186
Silk Stockings	354
Six Characters in Search of an Author	189
Tiger at the Gates	264
View From the Bridge (A)	272
*Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?	246

•

1954 Vol.

*Fanny	256
*Pajama Game (The)	324
*Witness for the Prosecution	216

•

1953 Vol.

Teahouse of the August Moon (The)	254

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 30, 1956*

1956 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1956

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
Affair of Honor	324
Debut	350
*Fallen Angels	389
Goodbye Again	316
*Great Sebastians (The)	397
Hot Corner (The)	378
Innkeepers (The)	373
King Lear	394
Little Glass Clock	335
*Middle of the Night	370
Miss Julie	353
*Mister Johnson	332
*Mr. Wonderful	339
*Month in the Country (A)	327
*My Fair Lady	345
*Ponder Heart (The)	358
Someone Waiting	365
Streetcar Named Desire (A)	362
Stronger (The)	353
Tamburlaine the Great	386
*Time Limit!	381
*Waiting for Godot	319

Theatre Openings

"Goodbye Again"
"Waiting for Godot"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 30, 1956*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Goodbye Again"

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

April 25, 1956

'Goodbye Again' Is a Good Farce, But It's Up Against Tough Times

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Goodbye Again," which was presented last evening at the Helen Hayes Theatre, is every bit as charming and funny as it was when it was first produced in 1932. Excellent cast, excellent direction, funny lines. But the world changes, and, even though this farce has been revised here and there to take note of the television age, "Goodbye Again" now seems a little quaint.

I don't feel sorry for this play by Allan Scott and George Haight; I feel sorry for ourselves. "Goodbye Again" is an innuendo . . . a gentle hint of naughty sex. Since 1932 everything has become more brisk and broad. Automobiles have become as wide as freight cars and their engines are powered by a thousand demons—and our plays have undergone almost exactly the same change.

A Slight Pretence

How can an innuendo—a sly and pleasant little joke—compete with such bold, broad, high-compression jobs as "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and "Pipe Dream"? I wish it could but fear it can't. We just don't waste our time on the pleasant game of Let's Pretend any more.

"Goodbye Again" pretends that Donald Cook, a successful author on a lecture tour, plays a date in Cleveland and encounters a woman who was daffy about him a dozen years ago. Since she is a daffy woman, though married, she heaves herself at him again. So Cook's female secretary—who shares nights as well as days with him—gets mad at him and so do a number of other people. The only person involved who doesn't get angry one bit is the woman's husband.

Cook is our best farceur when it comes to getting into mild sex troubles, so he is giving an excellent performance in this comedy. Polly Rowles, as his handsome but hard-headed secretary, is admirably cast. Tom Poston—who really ought to have a good big role some day—is an intelligent comedian in the role of a pompous young lawyer, and Hiram Sherman is delightful as the husband who remains calm but drunk through all the little involvements of the plot.

"GOODBYE AGAIN"

Comedy by Allan Scott and George Haight; staged by Shepard Traube; setting by Sam Leve; presented by Mr. Traube and J. H. Del Bondio at the Helen Hayes Theatre, April 24, 1956. The cast:

Anne Rogers.....Polly Rowles
Kenneth Bixby....Donald Cook
Walter.....Jim Stevenson
Bellman.....Fred Eisley
Maid.....Denise Dorin
Julia Wilson.....Sally Gracie
Chauffeur.....Clement Brace
Elizabeth Clochessy.....
Patricia Barry
Arthur Westlake...Tom Poston
Harvey Wilson...Hiram Sherman
Mr. Clayton....Burton Mallory
Theodore.....Danny Lee

Two creditable comediennes are Sally Gracie as the romantic wife and Patricia Barry as an indignant little ingenue. There is a good hotel room setting—which means that all the doors open and close—by Sam Leve, and Shepard Traube has directed "Goodbye Again" in the spirit of tasteful farce. There is nothing wrong with the play. It's the time we're in which is wrong.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

April 25, 1956

THEATER

'Goodbye Again'

By WALTER F. KERR

AT THE Helen Hayes Theater Tuesday evening—it was during the second act, I think—five determined souls sat down, folded their arms, and patiently waited for a man to come out of a closet. But there was more than a man in that closet. There was a skeleton there, too, and its name was "Goodbye Again."

In resurrecting this antique of 1932, producer-director Shepard Traube has taken the great trouble to corral at least three of the most efficient light comedians of our time. He has done this, no doubt, with the thought that each of them would bring to his or her mysteriously hollow role all of those juicy little tricks of inflection, timing, and tongue-in-cheek drollery that a... mselves to good, professional clowns over the years.

And, splendid sports that they are, each of them brings up the heavy artillery. There's Donald Cook to begin with, pushing up a hotel window and promptly strangling on a breath of fresh air. This is only the first of Mr. Cook's self-winding inventions. Before you have had time to start clocking them, Mr. Cook has hunched his head forward, so low on his shoulders that he looks like an inquisitive turtle, and begun to worry about the lunatics around him. No one can look more worried than Mr. Cook: his eyebrows sag until they scrape his cheekbones, his eyeballs freeze in horror, a muscle along his jawline begins to twitch rhythmically. And if there is one thing more entertaining than Mr. Cook's worry, it is his effort to appear heartily jocular while remaining worried. This is, as always, an expert piece of craftsmanship and, when Mr. Cook gets around to making a bed without getting out of it, a surprisingly funny one.

Working steadily beside him is Polly Rowles—she's playing secretary to his popular and much-pursued author — and Miss Rowles has a very fetching habit of relaxing in the middle of a room, tilting her blonde head back, and driving home a haymaker with the most innocent and sparkling of smiles on her face. She does it over and over again in "Goodbye Again" and you never get tired of the face.

Then, leaning idly against the door-jamb or sprawling comfortably in a hotel-room chair, there's Hiram Sherman. Mr. Sherman plays the husband of the woman who is currently trying to snatch Mr. Cook from his loyal secretary's arms, and his husbandly indifference to the whole proposition is splendidly conceived. A pleasant, deeply considered pause precedes each monosyllable that comes out of him. Serenity oozes from every pore. Given a piece of business in which he counts his blessings on the fingers of one hand and discovers that he has a thumb left over, he is wonderfully restrained and—as a result—wonderfully engaging.

But it may have been a mistake to apply such good people, and so many technical tactical fireworks, to the bleached bones of this Allen Scott-George Haight relic. The trouble with having actors around who can ingeniously pyramid their effects—with winks, bleats, stares, and spins—to a fine farce climax is that, when you get to the top, you'd better have a topper. Sooner or later all the facial and physical machinery is going to have to explode in a line of dialogue—in what the trade likes to think of as a payoff.

As things stand, "Goodbye Again" tends to pay off its preliminary pyrotechnics with:

"How can you be so rude to Arthur?"

"Why, that's easy."

Or, at a fairly high peak, with:

"All this squabbling is getting us nowhere!"

"Where did you want to go?"

The mood and the merry idiom of 1932 may have found this quite enough. Today, unhappily, it just leaves the actors standing there, resolutely stoking their engines for the next unprofitable assault.

Keeping more less out of the traffic lanes occupied by the busy principals are Patricia Barry, a pretty and appealing ingenue who can here do no more than look bug-eyed and wistful; Tom Poston, confined to lines even more lugubrious than his elongated countenance, and Sally Gracie, shuttling in bewilderment between a husband who doesn't want her and an author who doesn't want her, either.

Well, everybody had a hard time.

New York Post

April 25, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Trials of a Visiting Lecturer

Not that I recall them very vividly, but there must have been a lot of comedies since 1932 in which dashing novelists on lecture tours were pursued by romantic ex-sweethearts and rescued from their clutches by loyal and loving girl secretaries. Otherwise "Goodbye Again," which was first produced here in that year and seemed at the time a freshly humorous treatment of the subject, wouldn't have appeared so mild and unexhilarating in its revival at the Helen Hayes Theater last night, despite the skill of such expert farceurs as Donald Cook, Hiram Sherman and Tom Poston.

There's no getting around the fact that the passage of 24 years can take a lot out of even a fairly sturdy comedy, and the addition of various hopeful modernizations, such as incidental references to television, the wide screen, Alec Guinness, and the novels of John O'Hara, and the description of the faithful secretary as "a livin' doll," isn't enough to atone for the ravages of time. And, even in its heyday, the work by Allan Scott and George Haight didn't seem to possess the ingredients of ageless humor, for all the one-time brightness of its comic observation.

Personal Shows

It still is quite funny at times. This, however, is when the plot stops momentarily to permit Mr. Cook to go into his invariably expert farcical maneuverings, Mr. Sherman to indulge in his own style of bland, effortless and lounging humor, and Mr. Poston to demonstrate his dexterity with troubled comic pomposity. So long as these talented actors are giving their personalized shows, "Goodbye Again" is sufficiently entertaining. But the narrative keeps coming back again, and it just doesn't seem as enlivening as it did in those earlier days.

Even if you are coming on this narrative for the first time, it will hardly contain many surprises for you. The lecturer arrives in Cleveland, and the eager ex-sweetheart calls on him. At first he doesn't recognize her. Then he wants to escape. Then he finds her attractive again and decides to renew the affair temporarily. I don't imagine you'll be surprised when the husband turns up, and proves to be a pleasant fellow. And I doubt if I'm giving away a secret in reporting that it requires all the secretary's ingenuity to rescue the novelist.

The Ending

At that, there is one surprising aspect to the plot. It has an unhappy ending. At least, Mr. Sherman makes the husband so engaging that I, for one, kept hoping that it would be he who escaped from the amorous wife and that the lecturer would find himself with her permanently on his hands. Despite Mr. Cook's agreeable playing of the visiting novelist, I felt it would serve him right. But this was not to be. In the end, the husband forlornly takes his wife back and the secretary regains her boss, and I doubt if any of the quartet is to be congratulated.

The revival is certainly well acted, as even those of us who saw that unforgettably dynamic actor, the late Osgood Perkins, as the lecturer in the original production can attest. In addition to the excellent performances in the three leading comic roles, there is a bright and talented portrayal of the wife's younger sister by Patricia Barry, while Polly Rowles is skillful as the secretary. And it's difficult to blame Sally Gracie for not keeping the wife from seeming something of a nuisance. The Messrs. Cook, Sherman and Poston are fun to watch, but "Goodbye Again" shows its years.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 25, 1956

'Goodbye Again' Is Funny Again

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A half dozen handsome, agreeable and talented actors are plying the audience at the Helen Hayes Theater with a revival of a 25-year-old comedy entitled "Goodbye Again."

It is remarkable that this entertaining troupe is able to invest the work with as much humor as it does. Because the play itself is sketchy and trivial almost beyond description.

The story tells what happens to a successful author and lecturer when he is unfaithful to his secretary. He is surrounded by an old college love, who decides, with certain limited success, to take him back.

Some Good Laughs.

The evening is devoted to the efforts of her family and friends to make the author marry her, while he spends his time trying to elude her and win back his secretary.

This makes a talky session, with very little happening. But it is ingeniously played for the most part, so that the better sequences are hilariously funny.

Donald Cook plays the author and has a fine time playing easy to get. He makes up his bed while in it, at one point, then entertains himself playing slapjack, solo, with marked cards. Mr. Cook gets the evening's biggest laugh by phoning long-distance to a number in New York which will automatically tell him the time of day.

It is slick performing in a vein which is second nature to the star.

Gal of Moods, Plural.

Polly Rowles is the handsome secretary. She is almost the only member of the cast who has more than one mood to act, and act them she does, most attractively.

Hiram Sherman is the husband, and makes a wonderfully funny spectacle out of the most complacent character ever to meander across a stage.

As the ringleader of the troublemakers Tom Poston plays a hair-raising version of a humorless bore for a multitude of laughs.

As the indignant sister of the wandering wife Patricia Barry is most attractive.

Sally Gracie combines a magnetic figure, red hair and a trace of baby talk to make a disturbing figure of the wooing lady. And Fred Eisley adds a couple of cheerful moments as a willing bellboy.

All these performers deserve notice for their contributions beyond the call of duty. For there are many sections of the play which no one can energize. And when all is said and done, one concludes that in the depression days of 1932 people were highly grateful for any laughs at all.

The New York Times
April 25, 1956

Theatre: 'Goodbye Again'

1932 Comedy Revived at the Helen Hayes

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AGAIN, "Goodbye Again." First produced in 1932, it was revived in 1943, and put on for the third and last time at the Helen Hayes Theatre last evening.

For the antic comedy by Allan Scott and George Haight retains many of its incidental humors and still responds to lunatic acting. But the attitude toward middle-class stupidity that seemed delightfully iconoclastic in 1932 is not amusing today. "Goodbye Again" has the unhappy effect of making the audience more

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This is the saga of the irresponsible novelist on a lecture and book-signing safari through the central states who gets ambushed by an old sweetheart. Now married to a respectable business man, she decides to take up with her first love and develop his artistic genius.

In the era when Sinclair Lewis' satires of the American bourgeoisie were hot stuff, this situation suited the folkways of the city thinkers of the East. We are all bourgeoisie today. Everybody knows the score in Cleveland, Cincinnati and Detroit. The central jest of "Goodbye Again" has accordingly evaporated.

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What is left is some amusingly flippant writing, abetted by expert farce acting. As the irresponsible author, Donald Cook gives another enormously amusing performance that is full of sudden changes of pace and cockeyed emphases. His aplomb is never funnier than when he starts the day in a hotel room in Cleveland by calling Meridian 7-1212 on the long-distance, testifying to his unswerving confidence in the time of New York.

Hiram Sherman, plump and droll, plays the technically aggrieved husband with his familiar relish. There was never a more relaxed comedian. One of the funniest incidents of the play is the opening scene of the second act with Mr. Sherman musing in a chair. After a long silence he speaks the first line of the second act in a tone of resignation and despair. "I am a Republican," he says. It seems hilarious.

There is another funny man in the cast that Shepard Traube has directed. Tom Poston, unctuously overbearing, gives a very humorous performance as a humorless young lawyer—twitching, supercilious and petulant. Polly Rowles plays the worldly secretary with dry detachment. Inside an attractive hotel room, designed by Sam Leve, the cast gives a generally skillful performance, though Sally Gracie does not put much satirical electricity into the part of the covetous wife.

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In 1932 the cast of "Goodbye Again" had the adroit and unforgettable Osgood Perkins in the leading part. Among the less celebrated actors of the day were Myron McCormick as the fresh bellboy and James Stewart as a chauffeur, a part that has now been written out.

In the highly complex civilization of 1956, it is reassuring to note in the program that "'Goodbye Again' is controlled by the Goodbye Again Company." Fair enough. The company is advised not to lose control again.

Journal-American
April 25, 1956

See No Good Reason For This Revival

Comedy at the Helen Hayes Well Set Up and Strongly Cast, But—

By JOHN McCLAIN

GIVING it a gander from this angle there seems almost no reason to have revived the comedy, "Goodbye Again," which Shepard Traube and J. H. Del Bondio chose to do last night at the Helen Hayes Theatre. They have mounted it wonderfully well and employed the services of unassailable actors like Donald Cook, Polly Rowles, Hiram Sherman and Tom Poston, but it is difficult to understand why they could not have found a more fresh and fetching modern vehicle.

The play was presented first in 1932, with Osgood Perkins in the top slot. I didn't see it then, but I have a warm and relentless memory of Perkins and his ability to suggest more emotion with one gesture of his malleable mitts than most actors can express in an evening of eyebrow acting.

Maybe that accounted for its success two decades ago, but I doubt it—for Donald Cook is no slouch where any tricks are concerned.

Cook is a master of the double-take; the full head swivel. He can milk a line until it bleeds, he can wait for a laugh until the ushers sweep down the aisles. But here and now, with the world being what it is today, the situations in "Goodbye Again" — the whole comedic genre—just aren't funny enough.

It doesn't seem terribly important that a lecturer hasn't discovered, until he reaches Cleveland, that he's really been in love with his secretary all along.

I know that's an unfair definition of what happens, but it's at least short, and that isn't the point anyway. The real point is that this is a meagre and perfectly workable premise but it isn't developed with enough ingenuity or lasting humor to carry the evening.

Since 1932 we've had all sorts of shows about casual guys who are finally brought to grips with the fact that the grass is greener at home. This theme, it seems to me, has been explored and better exploited lately.

Up-Dated

People will still quote you—and it got its deserved laugh last night—the bit in which the hero calls Long Distance from his bed in a Cleveland hotel and says he wants to speak to Meridian 1212. I recall everybody talking about that when Perkins first delivered it in the original production, but of course now they've brought it up to date and Cook says, "Get me New York—Meridian seven-1212."

There are other efforts to modernize the whole property, but somehow the thing about the phone call is strangely prophetic.

What was funny then is still funny, but it's been done a lot since, and just because you talk about television or put a big SEVEN after "Meridian" won't save the day. The stuff had to be there in the first place.

I'm sorry, but I just don't think "Goodbye Again" has enough stuff.

Daily Mirror

April 25, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Goodbye Again' Means Just That

• Donald Cook is his usual gifted self in this revival at the Helen Hayes Theatre.

There's no use talking, "Goodbye Again" shows its age. When first we caught this frail farce by Allan Scott and George Haight—and that was plenty years ago—we recall finding it pleasant enough in an unimportant sort of way. As revived by Shepard Traube and J. H. Del Bondio at the Helen Hayes Theatre Tuesday evening, it still seems amiable but even more empty.

The title comes from an old song: "Hello Again . . . Goodbye Again . . ." That's a right good synopsis, too. For an irresponsible author, owing a few bucks of back income taxes, takes to the lecture circuit to pay off his Uncle Samuel. In Cleveland an old flame attracts his attention for part of an afternoon and evening.

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HER HUSBAND, who appears quite willing to part with her, **teams with his sister-in-law to see that the potboiler playboy does right by the flighty and romantic lion hunter. The poor man's Hemingway, however, prefers to blow town with his patient, long-suffering and ever-loving secretary.**

And so he does—after becoming embroiled in a few scatter-brained situations and exploding some reasonably funny gags. The latter have been brought up to date with references to current topics. They seem brighter than they really are in the hands of a first-rate cast.

There's Donald Cook, for instance, to pace the proceedings as the writer with the roving eye. He and Robert Preston, of "Janus," have few peers at lending a sparkle to worthy or pedestrian material. Their timing is deft, and they can make anything resembling humor crackle.

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HIRAM SHERMAN is on hand, as the baffled spouse, to help with the hi-jinks. He is a most ingratiating and relaxed farceur, able to garner chuckles with or without words. Polly Rowles, resisting the temptation to mug or to press, is likable as the exasperated Girl Friday.

Sally Gracie, who reminds us quite a bit of Parker McCormick, is amusing as the wife on the make for the visiting celebrity. Patricia Barry is attractive as her not-very-bright young sister, and Tom Poston has a high time of it taking off Orson Bean taking off Eddie Mayehoffe's idea of a burgeoning barrister.

Traube's direction is slick, while Sam Leve's setting is a nostalgic replica of the average hotel suite. You know, with those imitations of French impressionists on the walls.

In sum, it's a case of—"Hello Again . . . Goodbye Again . . ." Even though the one-and-only Donald Cook and gifted associates labor persuasively to conceal the wrinkles on the cheeks of this vintage lark. In spite of the current face-lifting, the crow's feet are still there.

"Waiting for Godot"

The New York Times

April 20, 1956

Theatre: Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'

Mystery Wrapped in Enigma at Golden

By BROOKS ATKINSON

DON'T expect this column to explain Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," which was acted at the John Golden last evening. It is a mystery wrapped in an enigma.

But you can expect witness to the strange power this drama has to convey the impression of some melancholy truths about the hopeless destiny of the human race. Mr. Beckett is an Irish writer who has lived in Paris for years, and once served as secretary to James Joyce.

Since "Waiting for Godot" has no simple meaning, one seizes on Mr. Beckett's experience of two worlds to account for his style and point of view. The point of view suggests Sartre—bleak, dark, disgusted. The style suggests Joyce—pungent and fabulous. Put the two together and you have some notion of Mr. Beckett's acrid cartoon of the story of mankind.

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Literally, the play consists of four raffish characters, an innocent boy who twice arrives with a message from Godot, a naked tree, a mound or two of earth and a sky. Two of the characters are waiting for Godot, who never arrives. Two of them consist of a flamboyant lord of the earth and a broken slave whimpering and staggering at the end of a rope.

Since "Waiting for Godot" is an allegory written in a heartless modern tone, a theatregoer naturally rummages through the performance in search of a meaning. It seems fairly certain that Godot stands for God. Those who are loitering by the withered tree are waiting for salvation, which never comes.

The rest of the symbolism is more elusive. But it is not a pose. For Mr. Beckett's drama adumbrates — rather than expresses—an attitude toward man's experience on earth; the pathos, cruelty, comradeship, hope, corruption, filthiness and wonder of human existence. Faith in God has almost vanished. But there is still an illusion of faith flickering around the edges of the drama. It is as though Mr. Beckett sees very little reason for clutching at faith, but is unable to relinquish it entirely.

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Although the drama is puzzling, the director and the actors play it as though they understand every line of it. The performance Herbert Berghof has staged against Louis Kennel's spare setting is triumphant in every respect. And Bert Lahr has never given a performance as glorious as his tatterdemalion Gogo, who seems to stand for all the stumbling, bewildered people of the earth who go on living without knowing why.

Although "Waiting for Godot" is an uneventful, maundering, loquacious drama, Mr. Lahr is an actor in the pantomime tradition who has a thousand ways to move and a hundred ways to grimace in order to make the story interesting and theatrical, and touching, too. His long experience as a bawling mountebank has equipped Mr. Lahr to represent eloquently the tragic comedy of one of the lost souls of the earth.

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The other actors are excellent, also. E. G. Marshall as a fellow vagrant with a mind that is a bit more coherent; Kurt Kasznar as a masterful egotist reeking of power and success; Alvin Epstein as the battered slave who has one bitterly satirical polemic to deliver by rote; Luchino Solito De Solis as a disarming shepherd boy—complete the cast that gives this diffuse drama a glowing performance.

Although "Waiting for Godot" is a "puzzlement," as the King of Siam would express it, Mr. Beckett is no charlatan. He has strong feelings about the degradation of mankind, and he has given vent to them copiously. "Waiting for Godot" is all feeling. Perhaps that is why it is puzzling and convincing at the same time. Theatregoers can rail at it, but they cannot ignore it. For Mr. Beckett is a valid writer.

"WAITING FOR GODOT"

Play by Samuel Beckett; staged by Herbert Berghof; setting by Louis Kennel; costumes by Stanley Simmons; presented by Michael Myerberg at the John Golden Theatre, April 19, 1956. The cast:

Estragon (Gogo).....Bert Lahr
Vladimir (Didi)..E. G. Marshall
Lucky.....Alvin Epstein
Pozzo.....Kurt Kasznar
A Boy...Luchino Solito de Solis

New York Post

April 20, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Odd and Fascinating 'Godot'

These are times that try critics' souls. Samuel Beckett's notorious "Waiting for Godot," a dramatic enigma that has been successful throughout Europe but has a reputation for sending its detractors screaming from the theater with indignation, opened last night at the John Golden, and it is alleged to be so obscure that even its author cannot explain it. Yet we reviewers are supposed to tell you what it's about. Before I try to say whether or not I understand Mr. Beckett's "tragicomedy," let me make one fairly definite statement. I found it continuously fascinating.

Perhaps "Waiting for Godot" is, as its enemies insist, a modern equivalent of Mark Twain's Royal Nonesuch. Conceivably the dramatist really did intend it as a hoax on the self-styled intelligentsia. But I think its one difficulty is, not that there is no explanation of its meaning, but that there are so many possible explanations; each playgoer must find and insist on his own, according to his lights. I know that it is one of the saddest, most despairing, most defeatist plays I've ever seen, but I also think it is moving, often funny, grotesquely beautiful and utterly absorbing.

The Two Tramps

It is certainly true, as even its admirers confess, that it has no beginning or end, and hardly even a middle. Two burlesque-show tramps are waiting in a desert place for a mysterious stranger they have never seen, a fellow by the name of Godot. From time to time, a boy arrives to tell them that Godot has been delayed. Meanwhile, as they wait, they quarrel and make up, indulge in a kind of personal doubletalk, exchange gags of a sort, and encounter a bumptious fat man called Pozzo, who is driving before him a slave known as Lucky. As the curtain falls, they're still waiting.

What is it about? I hope I don't sound too evasive when I say it's about life, about the human condition seen through the eyes of a profound pessimist. Mr. Beckett sees mankind in the terms of red-nosed comics, who are merely existing as they wait the arrival of some dream, which may, indeed, be God. Their plight is a desperate one, but they are alive and they have that dream, and they are at least better off than the go-getter and the slave, who rush about the world bent on some kind of activity but equally achieve nothing.

If I have suggested by all this that "Waiting for Godot" has a plot or that it says anything philosophically tangible, then I've unintentionally deceived you. All that it does is to establish its mood and set down a few hints in the bitter terms of sad-faced vaudeville, and it leaves the rest to the spectator. There are times when it is remarkably funny, but its fun is as bleak and lugubrious as its sardonic viewpoint. Nevertheless, grim, despairing and static as it is, this strange work does capture an odd emotional poignancy that I think is haunting and powerful.

It likewise seems to me that it is amazingly well staged and acted. You might think that Bert Lahr, who is a comic, and E. G. Marshall, who is a "straight" actor, would make an ill-assorted pair, but they are superb as the tramps, and completely right in their roles. Kurt Kasznar is brilliant as Pozzo, and Alvin Epstein is excellent as Lucky, particularly when he bursts into philosophic nonsense. And young Luchino Solito de Solis is equally right as the cryptic boy messenger. Herbert Berghof has directed admirably. I'm all on the side of "Waiting for Godot."

New York Herald Tribune

April 20, 1956

THEATER

'Waiting for Godot'

By WALTER F. KERR

THERE is something profound on the stage of the Golden, and its name is Bert Lahr.

Mr. Lahr is a vaudeville clown with a face that is bulbous, lined, and pierced with ferret-like eyes. He has been cast, presumably above himself, in "Waiting for Godot," a cryptically philosophical "tragicomedy" written by Samuel Beckett, one-time secretary to James Joyce.

In it, he plays a footsore, heartsore, inexplicably hopeful tramp who keeps his trousers up with a knotted cord and his spirits up—from time to time—with sudden, lyric intuitions that life may turn out to have a meaning on the day after tomorrow.

* * *

It is Mr. Lahr's very personal intuitions that count. He tugs, in earnest desperation, for a very long time at a shoe that is much too tight. Eventually, he gets it off. When it comes off, rapture spreads over Mr. Lahr's face, over the great grey-blue background that suggests an empty universe, over the whole auditorium—and all in a single sigh. Delight is born before our eyes, flesh becomes something felt absolutely, and life—the kind of life that all the rest of us live—now begins.

Life begins again in this clown's fierce joy in a carrot. He looks at the object lovingly, spiritually on his knees before it. When he is asked what it is that so dazzles him, his simple, ecstatic "It's a carrot!" spells out in an instant his relief that miracles are going to go on happening, his deep satisfaction with a world so glorious to the touch. He eats it rhapsodically, too.

Over and over again as Mr. Beckett's cerebral tennis-match goes its slow-motion way, this crumpled descendant of the very first goat finds a bleat, a whinny, or a toss of his chin to throw into the game and give it the tang and the echo of actual, earthy experience. His anticipatory chuckle as he begs to be told a funny story he has already heard, his forcibly raised eyebrows as he positively assures himself that he is happy, his passionate insistence that he is not listening to a word that is spoken—these are the rhythms of an artist with an eye for God's own truth.

All of them, I think, are the rhythms of musical comedy, of revue, of tanbark entertainment—and they suggest that Mr. Lahr has, all along in his own lowbrow career, been in touch with what goes on in the minds and hearts of the folk out front. I wish that Mr. Beckett were as intimately in touch with the texture of things. "Waiting for Godot" is not a real carrot; it is a patiently painted, painstakingly formed plastic job for the intellectual fruit-bowl.

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It has its tantalizing promises. Shafts of sympathy for two tattered representatives of mankind in general shoot out into the auditorium at erratic intervals, and you lean forward. Spatters of wit fall over, and between, the random dialogues that hold the despairing, the dominant, and the defeated together (a tyrant and his slave pass noisily, then haltingly, through as the two tramps go on waiting). "Waiting for Godot" is, in short, eternally extending its hand in invitation. But when you take it, you discover that it is very, very cold.

Mr. Beckett has begun by taking a simple enough formula: men wait for something that does not come, and when it does not come they go on waiting. But the formula has no tremendous depth of its own, it needs an overlay. Piled high upon it, then, are suggestions: suggestions that two tramps are two disparate but inseparable aspects of individual man, suggestions that can be read variously and furiously as Christian, existentialistic, or merely stoic allegories. The hints fly in all directions, perhaps deliberately. But the play, asking for a thousand readings, has none of its own to give. It is, in the last analysis, a veil rather than a revelation. It wears a mask rather than a face.

An excellent band of actors do all in their power to support Mr. Lahr's attempt to lift the veil. E. G. Marshall, as a fellow tramp of more rational bent, effectively establishes two or three immensely attractive sunset moods. Kurt Kasznar, as a man with a whip, bellows and then whimpers with enormous authority. Alvin Epstein's silent slave, driven at last to a mechanical flood of gibberish, is beautifully drawn. Luchino Solito de Solis delivers his 'heavenly' messages with quiet grace. Herbert Berghof's staging is sensitive, considered, surprisingly firm.

And for his heroic enterprise, producer Michael Myerberg hopes to find some 70,000 "intellecturals" who will support it for a minimum of four weeks. I hope the 70,000 go: they will find quite a few things to interest them. I hope some of the hardier souls who do not style themselves intellectuals go: they will find Bert Lahr, and a powerful aura of humanity circling him like a halo. And I hope, I profoundly hope, that I do not have to listen to the 70,000 utterly different analyses that are going to clog the air for months to come.

Daily Mirror

April 20, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Waiting for Godot' Lengthy Vaudeville

• Bert Lahr stands out in dramatic quest for sense in nonsense.

Several years ago Samuel Beckett penned a tragi-comedy called "Waiting for Godot." It has had productions in most of the capitals of Europe. The author was once secretary to that master of obfuscation, James Joyce. Beckett appears to have absorbed some of his employer's ability to make the simple complex.

Michael Myerberg, the noted experimentalist, gave "Waiting for Godot" its Broadway premiere at the Golden Theatre Thursday evening. We suspect it will have the same mixed reception that has greeted it abroad. It has been praised to the skies and damned to the nether regions. You either love or loathe it.

BECKETT IMPRESSES us as being a cynical Saroyan. Whereas the amiable Armenian has genuine affection for people, the sardonic Samuel seems to despise them. "Waiting for Godot" is a lengthy vaudeville act, an attempt to over-simplify eternal philosophical concepts.

It has amusing and moving moments, but, on the whole, fails to illuminate the problems it considers. It has a surface sheen, but little real depth. It's a cockeyed stunt. A comic sneers at life and those forced to live it. And it offers no hope, for its central figures want to hang themselves on a semblance of a tree, only to have their rotten piece of rope break.

Gogo and Didi, a pair of Weary Willies, wait hungrily by a roadside for a mysterious Godot to appear. He never does. And you have to draw your own conclusions as to who he is and what he represents. They encounter a sinister bully who drives an overburdened, moronic servant about with a whip. The former is probably a symbol of human cruelty, and the latter stands for those who have to bear it.

Bert Lahr is immensely funny as the tramp who can never find a pair of shoes to fit him, or get enough sleep, who grabs greedily for carrots and chicken bones, and wonders why in blazes he has to wait for Godot.

E. G. MARSHALL IS excellent as his foil, a hobo cursed with curiosity, with a desire to find some answers to such baffling topics as time, faith, fate and the very meaning of existence. Kurt Kasznar and Alvin Epstein are first-rate in other demanding roles. Demanding they all are, tremendously difficult to sustain, even with the helpful direction of Herbert Berghof.

Judging by comments overheard at intermission, there were those who found "Waiting for Godot" charming and imaginative, while others thought it a boring hoax. All, however, had praise for the comic genius of Lahr. Anyway, we predict that the new arrival will be the most controversial stab at profundity of the season.

As for your drama sampler, he kept thinking of those wonderful two-a-dayers, Moss & Frye. At the good old Palace and other such temples of entertainment, they anticipated "Waiting for Godot" via their inimitable skit, "How High Is Up?" They took only 15 brief minutes in their quest for sense in nonsense. Beckett takes over two hours. And that's too long, in our book.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 20, 1956

Bert Lahr Does Well in 'Godot'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It was a brilliant idea to cast Bert Lahr in the daring and inventive new comedy "Waiting for Godot" at the John Golden.

This work, at once pathetic and hilarious, supplies with Mr. Lahr the answer to that age-old question of why fine clowns yearn to play tragedy.

Everything the star has learned in his years of buffoonery is used here with aptness. Mr. Lahr's great performance reveals what a thin line there is between what is funny and what is sad.

So Different.

"Godot" cannot be compared to any other theater work, because its purpose is so different.

Two dilapidated bums fill their days as painlessly as they can. They wait for Godot, a personage who will explain their interminable insignificance, or put an end to it.

They are resourceful, with quarrels and their dependence on each other, as children are. They pass the time "which would have passed anyway."

Weakling Slave.

A brutal man of means comes by, leading a weakling slave who does his bidding like a mechanical doll. Later on he comes back, blind, and his slave is mute, but their relationship is unchanged.

Every day a child comes from the unknown Godot, and evasively puts the big arrival off until tomorrow.

There is no real hope. The only relief springs from the pair's sparse imagination. "We always find something to give us the impression that we exist," they proclaim.

It is a tragic view. Yet, in performance, most of it is brilliant, bitter comedy.

A lot of archgibberish has been heard about the obscurity of "Waiting for Godot." It is symbolical, and different.

But there is one perfectly simple clue to its nature.

It is a play about what people are, not what people do.

"Godot" is not a story. It is a portrait of the dogged resilience of a man's spirit in the face of little hope. Like a painting it needs to be considered all at once.

Mr. Lahr and E. G. Marshall are the two despondent, mutually enslaved specks of humanity. Life gives them no comfort, except their flights of wit, and the warmth of rushing back together after quarrels.

Nothing works for them. They set out to hang themselves, but the rope that was a belt, breaks. The only result is that Mr. Lahr's pants fall down.

Splendid Clown.

This splendid clown with his childlike confusion and mad glee, makes "Godot" an unforgettable evening. The tight shoes, the nightmares, the infantile bravado and the scurrying back to companionship, are all indelible details of an extraordinary characterization.

Kurt Kasznar makes a huge exotic figure of the greedy bully.

Mr. Marshall's role is a wry one. The character is pompous and physically wracked. While the actor is not capable of Mr. Lahr's fantastic flights, he is solid in supporting contrast.

With Invention.

Alvin Epstein plays the slave with invention, and vivid imagination in a long passage of mad nonsense.

Once more, Michael Myerberg has produced a novelty of stature in this tragi-comedy of Samuel Beckett, substantially directed by Herbert Berghoff, and brilliantly played by Bert Lahr.